Demand to remove encroachments from Buddhist Monuments in the country

SHRI R.S. GAVAI (Maharashtra): Sir, I thank you for permitting me to speak on the issue of encroachments on Buddhist monuments in our country.

According to the information available, there are 80 Buddhist monuments in our country, which have been encroached by one or the other elements in their immediate surroundings. Even the Bodh Gaya Mahabodhi Samiti has some members who belong to religious faiths other than Buddhism.

The then Prime Minister, late Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, had assured that the management of Mahabodhi Vihar in Gaya and that of other Buddhist religious places would be handed over to the *bona fide* Buddhist organisations.

In Lonavala, Maharashtra, the Buddhist caves have been encroached by the people of other religious faiths.

I urge the Government to investigate the matter and take suitable measures to remove all encroachments and hand over the management of all Buddhist monuments to *bona fide* Buddhist organisations. (Ends)

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Smt. Savita Sharda. She is not here. Smt. Sushma Swaraj. She is also not here. Shri C. Ramachandraiah. He is not here. Smt. Vanga Geetha. She is not here. Shri Kalraj Mishra. He is not here. Now, the hon. Minister of Defence, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, is going to reply.

Discussion on the working of the Ministry of Defence

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, at the very outset, I would like to express my gratitude to all the hon. Members who participated in the discussion on the working of the Ministry of Defence. Mr. Anand Sharma has initiated the discussion and many other hon. Members participated in it. They raised various issues concerning the functioning of the Ministry of Defence and other related problems comprising the budgetary allocations, finalisation of the Plan, modernisation programme of the Armed Forces, procurement procedure and many other related issues.

First of all, before I start responding to the issues raised by the hon. Members, I would like to place on record the services which the Indian Armed Forces rendered over the years and, particularly, on two recent occasions. When the Tsunami struck in the early hours of 26th December, 2004, the response of the Indian Armed Forces were unique. All the three wings of the Armed Forces, the Air Force, the Navy and the Army, came forward and they not only provided relief and succour to our people, whether it was Andaman and Car Nicobar Islands or the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Pondicherry, but also extended their support to the neighbouring countries, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. My colleague, the hon. Minister of External Affairs, is also present here. He has received appreciation from almost all these countries for the unique contribution made by the Indian Armed Forces. Sir, not only on the sea, but also on the land a peculiar situation arose some time in February. There was a huge snowfall, a huge avalanche, on the mountains and thousands of people were to be rescued by the Indian Air Force and they did so. Even in this hour of distress and difficulty, while the rescue operations were going on, a young mother gave birth to a child and the Armed Forces took care of them and the new-born child and the mother were treated well and they were safe. These persons, whether it is in the desert of Rajasthan or on the snow-capped mountains or in the dense forests of the North-East, pass sleepless nights to protect our borders and to ensure that we in the main land live in peace. Therefore, I do feel that we should appreciate their contributions and recognise the services rendered by them.

The Indian Army has very long history. I am not going back to the date of history. Many of my colleagues are fully aware of it. It was raised as a colonial force in 1776. After the battle of Plazy, the then East Indian Company raised this force. Thereafter, it was converted into three Presidency Provincial Forces, the Madras Presidency, the Bengal Presidency and the Bombay Presidency. At that time, there was no Mumbai; it was Bombay. Later, they were converted into the Indian Army. Since the raising of these forces, for more than 200 years, these forces have established their credibility and they have shown their commitment, especially, to the democratic institutions to the core of their heart.

As a student of History, sometimes, I wonder what was inherent in the system when we found—I would not mention the name of the countries with whom we got Independence, almost, at the same time, in the first part of the last Century—that one after another, in those countries, democratic

institutions collapsed, parliamentary form of Governments collapsed. But in India, despite poverty, despite illiteracy, despite backwardness, democratic institutions survived and there was no attempt by the Armed Forces to take over, which is a unique indication of their commitment, of their discipline, which we did not find in many other neighbouring countries. Therefore, when we discuss matters related to defence, we shall have to keep these factors also at the back of our mind. Sir, the procedure which we have adopted in this House is also unique one as we do not have the opportunity of voting the demands-for-grants for the respective Ministries and Departments Since the inception of the House, it was decided that we would pick up some subjects, some Ministries, for discussion and while discussing the functioning of the Ministry, we would look into the budgetary aspect also This is also a new innovation which the Upper House, the Council of States, has obtained and in that context, naturally, the relevance of budgetary allocations come. I do agree with the hon. Members when some of them pointed out that they used to find, year after year, the actual budgetary allocations were not spent during the year and at the revised estimate stage it was found that the actual expenditure was much less than what was allocated. Precisely, almost Rs. 24,000 to Rs 25,000 crores was the shortfall from several years, not one year, from the actual budgetary allocations. I am happy to inform the House that in the year 2004-05, we obtained Rs. 77,000 crores, as the total budgetary outlay, and in the revised outlay also the amount was same. Actually, it was not surrendered, it was not spent and there has been no occasion this year. As some hon. Members made it quite clear, I also would like to point out that it was not the only responsibility of the Ministry of Defence, it was also part of the responsibility of the then Ministry of Finance. When at the end of the year the Finance Minister gets rattled and in a developing country like ours, the Finance Minister finds himself in an uncomfortable position when the deficit rises high, therefore, at the end of the year, normally, he gives advice to various Ministries that you depress your expenditure. This year it did not happen. I do hope next year also it would not happen

Then an issue was raised that in a country like India where demands on resources are from many sectors, especially the social sector, social development sector, rural infrastructure, urban infrastructure, social infrastructure, economic infrastructure, when the competing demands are many, whether we are spending too much on defence. I am afraid I cannot share that perception. Our primary responsibility is to protect our country. From the days of Kautilya or even earlier days; from the days of Mahabharata to

Kautilya to the modern political treaties of Machiavelli the Prince, everywhere the Kings, whatever be the form, had been advised that your primary responsibility was to protect your people and for that you were getting taxes and revenue.

I am afraid, the concept of 'state' has changed. From the old concept of 'police state' we have moved to the concept of 'welfare state'. So, there are many more areas and sectors which demand money. If you look at our neighbours, every country spends nearly 3 per cent of their GDP on defence and defence requirements. It might sound very high, as my good friend,

(MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair]

Shri Manoj Bhattacharya, was asking why 13-14 per cent of the total expenditure of the Union Government was being spent on defence alone. But the percentage is not relevant. You will find that almost the same percentage has been there for decades. If I remember correctly, in my first Budget, our total defence expenditure was a little more than Rs. 7000 crores. Today it is Rs. 77000 crores; this year, it is Rs. 83000 crores. But when it was Rs. 7000 crores, at that time also, it was 14 per cent of the total expenditure. Therefore, the percentage is not relevant. What is of relevance is what we need for modernisation, for upgradation and for protection of our territorial integrity.

Sir, so far as our Defence Policy and Foreign Policy are concerned, they are closely linked. We do not have any territorial ambition. We do not want to annex the territories of others. We have no intention of exporting our ideology also to others. We do not have any competing commercial interests in any other country, except in a friendly manner, not in a conflicting manner. But we have, surely, strong determination to protect our country, to protect our territorial integrity and, if somebody wants to encroach upon it, we will to resist it as we have no territorial ambition, at the cost of others. Similarly, other also should not have any territorial ambition at our cost. This point should be very clear.

The second important issue that has been raised—and rightly raised because this is the House which has to give direction to the administrative Ministry; we are accountable to it—is about procurement. And, in that connection, certain specific cases have also been mentioned. I would not like to go into the specific cases, but I would mention the broad and general procurement policy, and what the procurement policy is. My good

friend and a very distinguished economist, Dr. Jalan, yesterday while making his observations had suggested that it could be left to the experts, to technically competent personnel, to determine and decide the requirement of our Army, Navy and the Air Force and he had asked, in that context, why there was this political responsibility.

As per the present practice, there are two institutions within the Ministry which look into the procurement. One is the Defence Acquisition Council. The Defence Acquisition Council is presided over by the Rakshamantri, the Defence Minister. The other is the Defence Procurement Board which is presided over by the Defence Secretary. In both these, there are technical personnel. The Armed Forces Chiefs are there in the Defence Procurement Board. The Vice-Chiefs of the Armed Forces are there. The Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister is there. The Chairman of the Defence Research and Development Board is there. Therefore, all these are technical persons. But in a parliamentary system, ultimately the accountability lies with the political executive. If we do not accept that, I am afraid, it will create a problem. The Reserve Bank has autonomy. The Governor of the Reserve Bank is the Principal Adviser to the Government of India on its monitory policy.

But, even for the Reserve Bank of India, the Finance Minister is accountable to the House. The Election Commission enjoys autonomy; the Comptroller and Auditor General of India enjoys autonomy. But, if something happens there, the accountability is on the Minister. In the Parliamentary system of Government that is the basic principle. Therefore, we cannot shirk that responsibility. We shall have to accept that responsibility and we shall have to proceed on the basis of that.

Sir, now various suggestions have come in regard to procurement. I would like to state that this is constantly under review. We had one Procurement Policy in 1992, which was changed in 2002. Thereafter, it was further revised in 2003. And, it is again going to be revised. I have appointed an Expert Group under the Chairmanship of Shri Vijay Kelkar, another distinguished economist and a civil servant. And also, we are reviewing it from the experiences which we have gathered. Surely, I can assure the Houe that whenever it will be finalised, we will put it on the website so that there is total transparency and people can know what the procurement policy is. And, if it is needed, we can have a detailed discussion. Especially, I have identified a couple of areas where doubts come. There is the question of issue of singly inventory. Why do you give order to a particular company, only one? Very often, you will find that the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report

1.00 P.M.

does not challenge your policies. The policy is to be decided by the political executive accountable to Parliament. But, whenever there is a deviation from the policy, it is the job of the Comptroller and Auditor General to point it out. The position of the Comptroller and Auditor General has been created for that. I am pained that one of my friends, a colleague in the political establishment—of course, not belonging to my party—very bitterly criticised the Comptroller and Auditor General for his reports. He said, "Who is he to decide what type of weapons will be required for the Armed Forces?" The Comptroller and Auditor General is not sitting on judgement on that. The Comptroller and Auditor General is sitting on the judgment that this is the policy. You yourselves have evolved this policy and whether you are acting as per that policy is to be looked after by me, and for that, this constitutional post has been created. He is paid for doing this job to find out if there is any lapse, if there is any irregularity. Therefore, I don't find any reason why while discharging his constitutional responsibilities he should be criticised. Unfortunately, it has been done. Mr. Chairman, Sir, this should not have been so. Whenever the defence deals come to our mind, many a times, our mind goes back to the days of late eighties. A bright young man was victimised. Each and every one of us, report after report, has categorically stated the type of gun which is known as Bofors was the best artillery gun now available to the Indian Army to counteract the enemy. But, that young man was not spared even after his death. After his death, his name was put in a case of corruption. Then the matter came up before the court. After 20 years, not an iota of evidence is available and still his name was to be put in the charge sheet before the court. This is the atmosphere which, unfortunately, has been created. I don't want to continue that atmosphere. But, somebody simply cannot close the chapter, which exists very much in the recent political annals. It cannot be erased; it cannot be ignored.

We can try to come out of that syndrome, which we are trying to do so. Unnecessarily, a controversy has been raised on the issue of an affidavit. An affidavit is nothing but a statement of facts before a court of law, as per the requirement of the legal system, legal jurisprudence. If we look at the whole scenario, Sir, you will find that somebody filed a Public Interest Litigation case that certain things have not been done, certain actions which are to be taken by the Ministry in regard to procurement, have not been done. What the Ministry has to do? The Ministry had to reply. The reply must come in the form of an affidavit.

On 14th March, an affidavit is filed in the court. Nobody takes any notice of it. Suddenly, on 5th April, somebody comes out with a Press Statement and says, "Look, this is the piece of affidavit where I have received the clean chit", and the whole world bursts. Nobody takes care to look into the affidavit of 21 pages as to where the clean chit has been given. In a piece of document, it has been suggested that for inquiring the five cases the matters are being referred to the CBI. If somebody can claim that it is a clean chit, and on the basis of that, if a controversy is raised, what can be done? Whether it is correct or not, the judges of the Supreme Court are to decide. Lawyers have to file. There, it was pointed out that the second affidavit would be needed. The Attorney General, who is the principal law officer of the Union of India, suggested this. What would the Ministry do? The Ministry would have to give the second affidavit as per the commitment made in the court. The moment second affidavit is given, it is alleged that it is a political vendetta. "वापस लो। Defence Minister इस्तीफा दो।" And the Houses can't transact business. We must come out of these things. We must look at the things in a proper perspective becuase issues are very sensitive issues.

The subject which we are dealing with belongs to the people who are having everything at stake; they are not writing essays in air-conditioned rooms. In the height of Siachen, in the dense forests of North-Eastern India, in the deserts of Rajsthan, they are spending their sleepless nights.

Whenever I enter into my room, I come across with a quote. Of course, I didn't put it, somebody, many years ago has put it. The quote is on a warrior. The first line of that quote is, "I am a warrior. To protect my country is my *dharma*, my religion." And the last line of that quote is, "God, give me strength." Strength for what? "That I don't ask anything for me." That is the motto of a warrior. Therefore, when we will be dealing with this subject, my most respectful submission would be that we should deal with them with sensitivity, with compassion which they deserve.

Another aspect which has been raised is in regard to indigenisation. I do entirely agree that we should go in for indigenisation. Here also, you shall have to keep in mind certain factual changes which have affected us and we are not responsible for that. Up to the collapse of Soviet Russia, we used to get substantial military hardware from the then Soviet Russia, whether it was tank or gun or fighter aircraft; and that system collapsed. We had to go all over the market. Still they are one of our important suppliers but we have opened it and it is not just as you shop from a super-market,

that you will go and pick up from the shelf. You will have to go and search and make according to your specification. Dr. Jalan has very correctly pointed out that the defence market is not only imperfect, not only lacks competition, but also there is an overwhelming cartelisation; some times, it relates to only one or two manufacturers.

Mr. Anand Sharma has very correctively pointed out how much time it has taken for us to deliver our advanced flight helicopters, to develop our Cauvery Engine. Our DRDO, the Defence and Research Development Organisation and other organisations are doing their best. The HAL is doing its best and HAL is one of the public sector enterprises, which has been recognised for its efficiency and for its competence. It is highly recognised not only in our country but also all over the world. But why was it delayed? One of the major reasons was that when there was Pokhran-II explosion in 1998, there was a total ban on import of all sophisticated technology which is required here and some equipments for manufacturing the Cauvery Engine. Therefore, there was delay. Sanction was there. Some countries have their role. I cannot quarrel with them. But if I am have to have it, I am telling you that for Cryogenic engine the problem which we had, we could overcome. But for Cauvery Engine when we had this problem, there were these issues. These are the factors, which sometimes cause delay, but not always. But that cannot be used as an exercise. Somebody has pointed out that we are going to enter into an arms race. As I mentioned, keeping in view our requirements, I myself commented when it was pointed out to us for the first time, myself, Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, we told the US Defence Secretary, "Mr. Secretary, we appreciate your necessity of keeping Pakistan as an ally to fight against terrorists, Al Queda and Taliban. In your engagement against them, Pakistan is an important ally. We do not mind that. You have that ally. Pakistan has its own place in your overall strategy. We do not mind. There are many countries, which are important to us in our overall approach. But our limited point is that the type of argument, which you are putting forward that these types of lethal weapons are required to fight against terrorists, we are unable to accept that because these types of weapons are required for a fullfledged war. It is not required to fight against Taliba or Al Qaeda or any other terrorist groups. These equipments are not required for that. It may not only upset the balance but it may trigger an urintended arms race. We do not want it." But I know what happened—as a young student I

remember—when in 1962 Bomdila failed, political upheaval took place, V.K. Krishna Menon as Defence Minister had to resign. One of the major allegations was that "you have slackened your defence preparedness and people had to die." I am afraid we cannot take that risk. As I do not have any ambition, any territorial ambition, at the same time, I cannot allow any slackening in our defence preparedness. Our preparedness is not for aggressive purposes, but for protective purposes. Therefore, this aspect is also to be kept in view. What would be the requirement, it will be decided in consultation with the Armed Forces, the Army, the Air Force and the Navy. And whatever will be there, we will try to do it. We are having the maximum indigenisation. Somebody has expressed doubt why we are involving the private sector. We are not involving them to hand over the public sector units to them. The public sector enterprises, which we have, or the ordnance factories which we have, we are not going to hand over these to the private sector.

We are telling them, 'if you are buying from outside and you can manufacture that,' you do it. Jointly we can do and some of them we are doing it. In some platforms, in some missiles, L&T, TATA, they have been involved but that has not diluted the functioning, either of the departmental undertaking or of the Defence PSUs. Their order books are full fortunately. Therefore, Sir, there are certain areas; certain issues have been raised specially on dynamite. An issue has been raised on that and on that, I will look into it. I would not like to take more of your time. I would like to suggest only one small point. I would like to suggest that we are fully prepared. Again, I am repeating, our intention is not to find fault everywhere. But in our system, if there have been any lapses, any omission and commission, which has caused harm to the country, that cannot go unnoticed. That will have to be detected and the guilty are to be penalised without any vindictiveness. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir, for giving me this opportunity.

श्री सभापति: सदन की कार्यवाही भोजनावकाश के लिए एक घंटे के लिए स्थगित की जाती है।

The House then adjourned for lunch at eleven minutes past one of the clock.

The House reassembled after lunch at eleven minutes past two of the clock, THE VICE-CHAIRMAN, (Shri Santosh Bagrodia) in the Chair